

John Williams to Andrew Jackson, November 1, 1814, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

COLONEL JOHN WILLIAMS TO JACKSON.¹

¹ Colonel Williams, of the 39th Regiment, regulars, was in Knoxville trying to recruit his regiment. He had 1000 stand of arms in his possession for that purpose, but as recruits came in very slowly the larger portion of the arms was not in use. When therefore Brig.-Gen. Nathaniel Taylor, of the East Tennessee Militia, about to set out to join Jackson with 1000 men, half of them without arms, called on him for 500 of the unused arms, he met a curt refusal. Taylor's request, accompanied with an offer of proper receipts, was first made as a request and then as a peremptory demand. To the demand Williams sent the following reply:

“ *Sir*: By your order of this date, you require me to deliver into the hands of the militia the muskets which have been furnished for my regiment. You have been already informed that it is not in my power to part from the arms in my possession. I am under the necessity of refusing positively a compliance with your order. I deem it unnecessary at this time to investigate your authority to give me an order. I have the honor to be with great respect,”

All this Taylor reported to Jackson Sept. 28, 1814. This was the beginning of an enmity between Jackson and Williams, who was popular in East Tennessee, that cropped out with great evidence after Jackson was a candidate for the presidency.

Knoxville, November 1, 1814.

Sir, Your letter of the 17th ulto. excites both regret and astonishment. Regret at having incurred the displeasure of my commanding General—And astonishment at the

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position assumed in that letter. Had you been acquainted with all the circumstances attending the transaction, I feel confident you would not have considered me, meriting, such a harsh reprimand. I was apprised that a communication had been made to you from Knoxville, by Genl. Taylor. But supposing, that it would be understood by you, and that it would be treated as it deserved; I was perfectly silent on the subject. It is the opinion of every military man that I have conversed with, that situated as General Taylor and myself were, he had no authority to give me an order. I admit when a Militia Genl. and a United States colonel are associated in the same service, by the order of their superiors; that then the former has a right to command, and the latter is bound to obey. Genl. Taylor was on one description of service, and myself on another. General Taylor had the same power to demand of me, the military clothing, in my possession, for the use of his troops; as he had to demand my arms. And I should have been as criminal in delivering up the one, as the other. In either case, I should have been accountable to the Government, and bound to have paid the amount, out of my private funds. A system of accountability has been established, And nothing but the order of a legitimate superior would justify me in disposing of the public stores in my possession; in a manner different from the one intended. I am assured that Genl. Taylors correspondence with me, was not commenced, with an expectation of promoting the public service.

I entered the army with no other view than to perform honorable service to my country. Altho the unwearied and unceasing exertions of myself and others on the recruiting service, has not been crowned with much success, during this season, It is not owing to causes over which I have any control. No person on earth more than myself regrets the ill success of the recruiting officers. I agree with you that this is not a time to investigate nice military questions of rank. From the many proofs which I have given of the truth and importance of this remark (within your own observation) I did not expect to be reminded of its necessity. I yield to no man in a disposition to promote the service of my country. And it would afford me infinite satisfaction to deliver over all the public stores in my possession to promote the service, if I had a legal order to that effect. But I never will involve myself

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in ruin by squandering the public stores confided to my care. And I will resist every attempt to make me responsible for others faults. I am always ready and willing to have every act, both of my civil, and military life, envestigated. In the exercise of your discretion you seem to think these are sufficient grounds for my arrest. I shall therefore hold myself in readiness to recieve your order of arrest, And to repair without delay to such place as may be appointed for my trial.

I have the honor to be